

FORESTRY NOTES SPECIAL REPORT



National Association of
Conservation Districts

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST WILDFIRE

Wildfire is a constant threat to America's forests. Drought, insects and disease, and the absence of management further intensify the threat it poses.

Conservation districts are among those actively fighting back against wildfire. Districts across the country help educate civic leaders, private landowners and youth about the devastation wildfire can bring. District staff also help take traditional measures such as installing fuel breaks and removing standing dead timber and potential ladder fuel from the forest floor.

A number of conservation districts have taken a creative approach. Some of the best examples have occurred in Washington State, which has had its share of catastrophic wildfire events in recent years.

Cascadia Conservation District is part of a multi-organizational effort that educates landowners on insurance-related issues and recovery treatments for their specific property. The district helps connect landowners with program resources



to assist in replacing infrastructure, soil erosion controls, and property rehabilitation.

"We saw a lot of landowners that were impacted by the fires and didn't really know what the next steps were to recover their land. The topography, and inherently the landowner and what they're doing on the property, informs those next steps, which make this process unique to each landowner," CCD Program Director Mike Cushman told NACD Forestry Notes earlier this year.

Following 2014's devastating Carlton Complex Fire, Okanogan Conservation District coordinated open house-style outreach events to help those affected cope with the aftermath of the fire. The district conducted more than 300 site evaluations to determine damages on private lands and then implemented over \$500,000 in direct cost-share to landowners for the installation of conservation practices

to control erosion, rebuild fences and protect homes from flash floods. Later, Okanogan Conservation District assembled a wildfire toolkit containing a wealth of resources to serve landowners and local resource professionals.

Perhaps most impressive, the district led the first-ever private/state lands Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team to evaluate burn severity and identify risks to human life and critical public infrastructure.

"Now, five years later, the Okanogan Conservation District and Washington Department of Natural Resources are strategizing how to make the private/state lands BAER team a standing resource for Incident Commanders to call upon in Washington State. It is part of a larger effort by state fire and emergency management officials to begin the transition from suppression to recovery before containment is even achieved," Okanogan District Manager Craig Nelson said.

Districts make a difference in so many ways

It seems we have one record-setting wildfire season after another. In fact, two of the worst wildfire seasons (total acres burned) from the past half-century have occurred in just the last four years. More than ever, our forests need sound management to lessen the threat of future fires. But beyond that, we need strategies

to cope with the fires we do experience – to rebuild the forest and support those affected.

Our agency partners are rising to the challenge, and our elected leaders are perhaps more educated than ever before with regard to the needs of our forestlands.

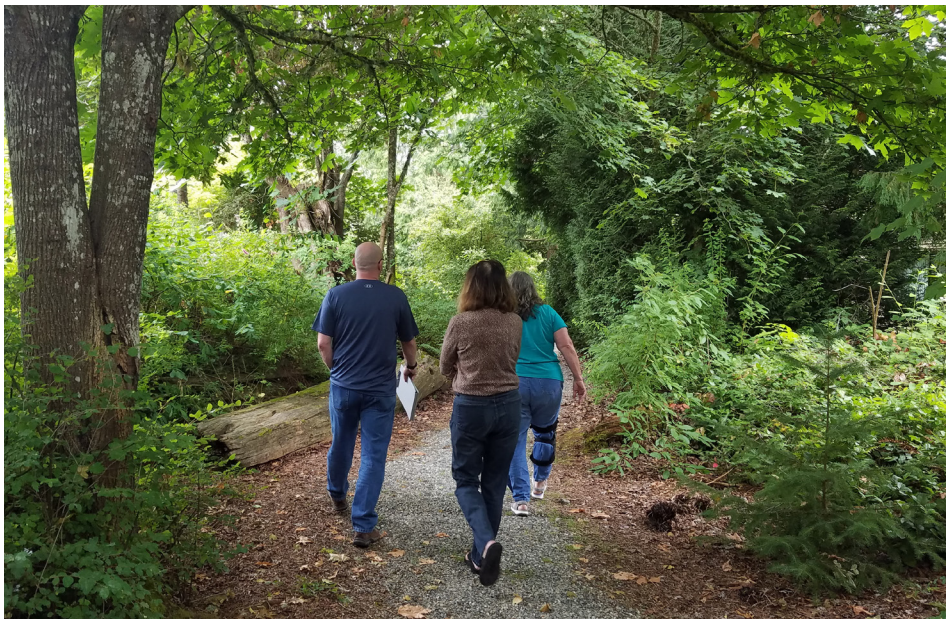
Conservation districts are filling a role, too. Whether leading the charge or playing a small part, districts are making a difference in so many ways. This Special Report of Forestry Notes is dedicated to showcasing the full spectrum of district involvement.

NACD is interested in learning about other ways conservation districts are combatting

wildfire, either before it occurs or as part of efforts to rebuild after it strikes. Share with us your successes in building partnerships and making an impact in the forest - we look forward to hearing what your district has helped accomplish. In the meantime, keep up the good work!



**Steve Hedstrom, Chair
NACD Forestry
Resource Policy Group**



King CD hires staff to address local wildfire concerns

The King Conservation District (KCD) in Renton, Wash., has long worked with landowners on forest stewardship planning. Recently, within the past three years, KCD has expanded its work to cover wildfire resiliency and preparedness.

When word spread that KCD covered wildfire resiliency and preparedness, many landowners began requesting the district's services. The increase in public interest led to contacts with homeowners' associations and other small communities who had wildfire concerns and green space that the members were responsible for.

"There were no resources for [these small communities] beyond having to hire a contractor," KCD Program Manager for Urban and Rural Forest Stewardship Mike Lasecki said. "So, we saw the most impact on the ground with working with those communities. We identified this need in the local county to provide this service at the community scale."

The expansion in services also required

increasing staff capacity. Matt Axe joined KCD in June as the full-time wildfire and forest resiliency coordinator assigned to conduct community wildfire risk assessments, as well as meet with individual landowners and small community forest landowners for stewardship planning.

"He hit the ground running," Lasecki said. "Right now, seasonally, the wildfire resiliency and preparedness is taking up most of his time, but he's also working on a stewardship plan for a community we had been in contact with prior to his starting."

Axe will be working with communities to implement wildfire risk reduction projects, which could be as simple as clearing out dead brush, understory or stacks of downed tree limbs.

Axe has also conducted presentations to communities, which is the first step when KCD identifies or hears of a community wanting a risk assessment and/or forest stewardship planning.

The district travels to the community, provides information, listens to their concerns, addresses questions, and works in partnership with local, county and state officials like the Washington Department of Natural Resources, local first responders and the fire district and the county's forestry program.

"We meet people where they're at," Lasecki said. "One of the benefits of us being able to come out is we know you're going to keep that tree, so here's what you need to do in order to do so, and still reduce the risk. We're here to help."

KCD is also working on cost-share initiatives for individuals and communities, assisting in planning chipper days and/or other events

where the landowners and contractor would benefit in combining the services needed into a multiple-property effort.

"[Axe] has given us that single point-of-contact for our landowners and communities. So far, it's been a great success," Lasecki said.

RCD of Greater San Diego County leads collaborative approach to battling wildfire

The Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Greater San Diego County will use funds from the California Department of Conservation (DOC) and the California Natural Resources Agency to further regional work on reducing local wildfire threats and impacts.

The RCD was awarded \$1.425 million from the California DOC this year as part of a block grant that will be directed toward the RCD/Fire Safe Council of San Diego County through the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program. The funds will be used in part, to develop a regional fire priority plan, project demonstration and regional outreach and education.

"What this grant is designed to do is work collaboratively with our fire agency partners

"If you have a clear fire fuel break, but you don't have defensive space around the community it abuts, the fire break may become ineffective," Landrum said.

to support each other's projects and to work more on a regional scale," RCD Executive Director Sheryl Landrum said. "We're trying to make California more fire resilient."

"Fire is a real threat in San Diego County and now the rest of the state as well. We have climate change, we've been in drought for many years, and people are building homes and communities within the wildland-urban interface (WUI)," she said. "Fire is not a matter of 'if it happens' anymore, it's now when it happens; we need to learn to live with wildfire in California. Our regional fire priority plan is not just a strategic plan from one agency, but a strategic plan with all our land managers' fire priority plans, so it's cohesive and collaborative, and it will strengthen San Diego's ability to become more fire resilient."

The Fire Safe Council is made up of the RCD, federal, tribal, state and local fire agency partners, as well as other stakeholders, and includes the Cleveland National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, CAL FIRE, State Parks, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The agencies have been working with each other since the council formed in 1996. Through this grant, they will be able to combine efforts between all organizations to better identify high-level at-risk areas and work on the ground together more efficiently and effectively for the largest scale and most cost-effective projects on the basis of priority.

"Everybody has large areas of lands they're managing which have designated fire priority areas. This grant is allowing us to bring all of these lands and fire priorities to the table so we can document everyone's area, list the fire priorities and then, as a group, prioritize which of these fire projects to tackle first as a collaboration," Landrum said. "We are working together, not in isolation."

For example, if CAL FIRE has a fire break it is working on, and the RCD can target a community for defensible space, then the two agencies are working together to get the projects combined for a larger impact.

"If you have a clear fire fuel break, but you don't have defensive space around the community it abuts, the fire break may become ineffective," she said.

Landrum said the group will meet frequently to identify projects, prioritize fire issues and develop the demonstration project, which could be a project an agency already has an eye on or one that the group comes up with jointly.



Brett Moore, Lobbyist for Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, Jeff Downing, JCD landowner, Patti Von Vihl, JCD landowner, Bill Von Vihl, JCD landowner and Samantha Delfing, JCD forester

Jefferson CD helps educate policymakers on wildfire funding needs

The Jefferson Conservation District (JCD) is putting a face on forest conservation issues in Colorado by testifying before state legislators and showing them the benefits of continuing to fund program grants at the state level.

In March – the third time in the past five years – district staff, landowners and Colorado Association of Conservation Districts' (CACD) lobbyist Brett Moore (pictured far left) attended a House Rural Affairs and Agriculture hearing on House Bill 19-1006 (Wildfire Mitigation [in] Wildland-Urban Interface Areas), which provides state funding for grants to agencies like JCD for wildfire mitigation projects on private lands. The committee approved and forwarded the bill, and it has since become law.

"These grants are critically important to getting forest conservation work done on the

ground," JCD Director Garrett Stephens said. "Most of the testimony these legislators hear is from agency officials and lobbyists, so it was especially compelling for us to bring private landowners to share their perspective."

Property owners Bill and Patti Von Vihl (pictured second from left) also testified, saying that without the assistance from JCD, they and their neighbors would not have been able to afford and manage a mitigation/restoration project that spans 18 landowners and 250 treated acres – a project that JCD just finished this summer.

The bill provides the continuation of an annual state grant that funds various wildfire mitigation and forest restoration across the state. This fiscal year it will fund \$1 million worth of projects.

"Non-federal sources of match are hard to come by," Stephens said. "That's why this state grant is important to us."

In the past six years, JCD has treated nearly 1,000 acres through various projects using a total of about \$1.2 million in state grants under this type of legislation, Stephens said.

"Forestry work on Colorado's Front Range is very expensive, ranging from \$1,000 to \$3000 per acre; this is largely due to our steep, rocky terrain and the low quality of wood being harvested," Stephens said. "Without grants and other Farm Bill incentives, from partners like the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), these projects would not be possible."



10,541: Texas had more fires than any other state in 2018

**Source: NIFC*



30: Researchers believe the true cost* of a wildfire can be as high as 30 times the total suppression cost. Last year's suppression costs totaled a record \$3.14 billion.

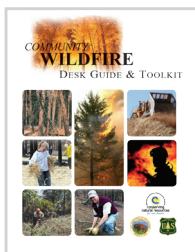
**Source: The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western U.S. (Western Forestry Leadership Coalition, 2010)*



Nearly 85 percent* of wildland fires in the United States are caused by humans. Human-caused fires result from campfires left unattended, the burning of debris, equipment use and malfunctions, negligently discarded cigarettes, and intentional acts of arson.

Source: 2000-2017 data based on Wildland Fire Management Information (WFMI) and U.S. Forest Service Research Data Archive

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS RELATED TO THIS SPECIAL REPORT



The NACD Community Wildfire Desk Guide and Toolkit were designed as references for conservation districts, resource conservation development councils, and Extension professionals. The desk guide provides information about activities prior to, during, and

after wildfire; while the toolkit provides more thorough explanations and examples of these activities.

https://www.nacdnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Desk_Guide_and_Toolkit.pdf



The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), located in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support center for wildland firefighting. Eight different agencies and organizations are part of NIFC.

<https://www.nifc.gov>



WESTERN FORESTRY LEADERSHIP COALITION

The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western U.S. is a publication produced by the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition in 2010.

https://www.blm.gov/or/districts/roseburg/plans/collab_forestry/files/TrueCostOfWilfire.pdf

